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# A HISTORICAL LABORATORY

*How the Expert Historian  
does his Work*



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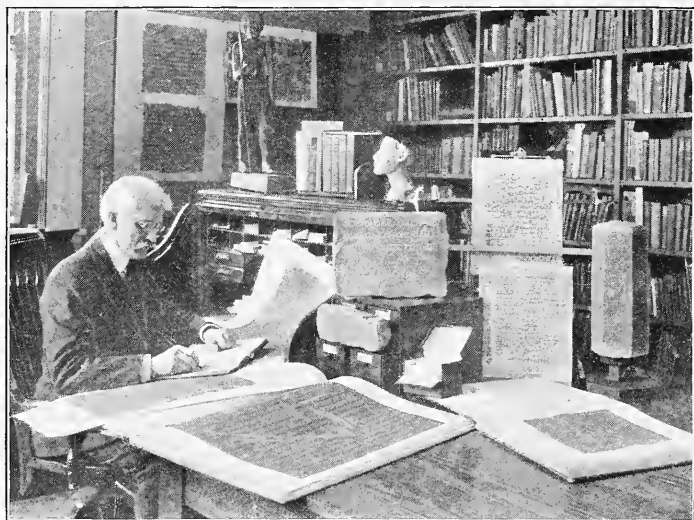
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PROFESSOR JAMES HENRY BREASTED, THE DIRECTOR  
OF THE NEW INSTITUTE, AT WORK IN HIS OFFICE ON  
NEW AND UNPUBLISHED HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS

The two stones on the card catalogue case in the middle are new Greek inscriptions. On their right are two tall pages of an unpublished medical treatise of the seventeenth century B.C. On the top of the roll-top desk are a replica of the famous bust of Ikhnaton and the standing statue, over four thousand years old, of an Egyptian chieftain. The large sheets lying on the desk are copies of the "Coffin Texts," the religious documents explained within. These new monuments and records represent some of the original sources which the Oriental Institute of The University of Chicago is collecting and converting into the latest historical knowledge.

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## TWO WAYS OF WRITING HISTORY

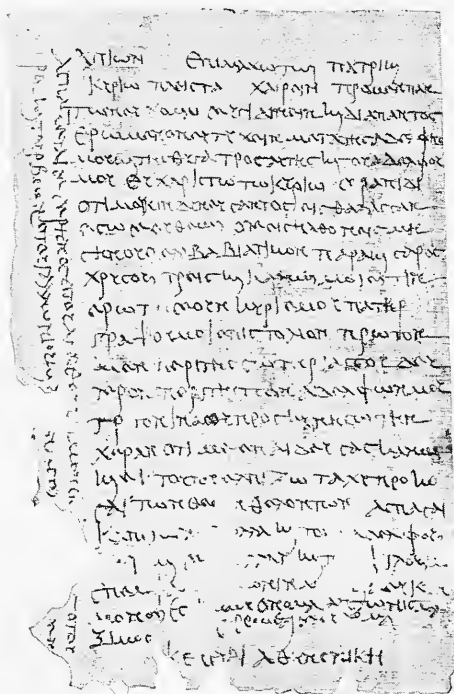
"You must have read a great many books to get together the facts for writing that history," once remarked an old gentleman to his nephew, a young orientalist, who had just published an important history of an ancient country. As a matter of fact, the old gentleman's nephew had read almost no books at all in order to write his volume; on the contrary, he had been bending over nothing else but ancient inscribed stones, papyri, and clay tablets for ten years, and from these he had drawn the facts for his history. It was these ancient witnesses from a distant past whose voices spoke in the pages of the book, and it was their testimony which the modern reader of the volume heard as he perused its pages.

Few readers of history, however, stop to raise the question—Am I reading statements and opinions gathered and pieced together by this author from the pages of *other men's books*, or has he read the *original documents and monuments* and drawn out of *them* the facts which fill his book? Is the author I am reading merely a knight of the paste-pot and shears who has industriously clipped from the writings of other men, or does he write with authority, *of his own first-hand knowledge*? Has he built up his book from the original documents themselves? If he writes of American history, does he describe the campaigns of Washington and Lee from a study of the letters, journals, and reports of these leaders and their contemporaries, or has he merely gone to a library and read a number of books by other historians?

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## THE NEW SOURCES OF GREEK AND ROMAN HISTORY

What we mean by a "historical source" or an "original document" is well illustrated by the *newly discovered* documents



LETTER OF APION, A YOUNG SOLDIER IN THE  
ROMAN ARMY, TO HIS FATHER, EPIMACHOS,  
IN EGYPT

which must be studied by the historian of *ancient* times. A good example is the following letter written to his old father by a young Roman soldier over seventeen hundred years ago. This young recruit in the Roman Emperor's army was an Egyptian youth named Apion. Having enlisted in the Roman army in company with other boys from his little village in Egypt, Apion bade his family good-by and embarked on a great government ship from Alexandria for Italy. After a dangerous voyage he arrived safely at Misenum, the Roman war

harbor near Naples, and hastened ashore in his new uniform to have a small portrait of himself painted and to send his father the following letter. It was written for him in Greek, on papyrus, in a beautiful hand by a hired public letter-



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writer, and it reads as follows (with modern explanations in brackets) :

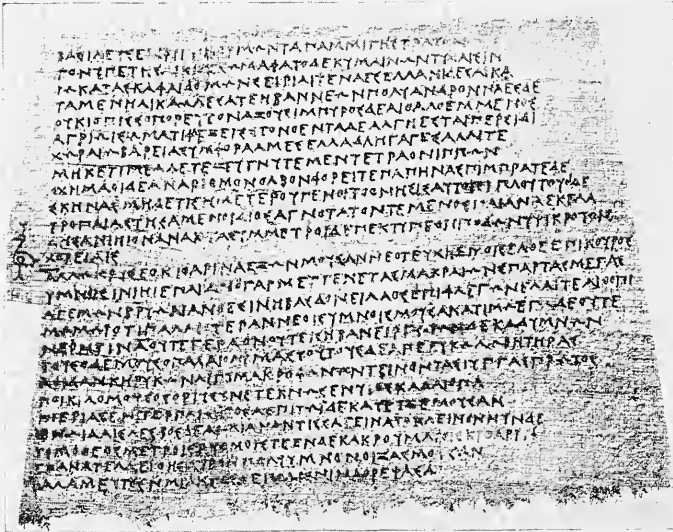
“Apion to Epimachos, his father and lord, many good wishes! First of all I hope that you are in good health, and that all goes well with you and with my sister and her daughter and my brother always. I thank the lord Serapis [a great Egyptian god] that he saved me at once when I was in danger in the sea. When I arrived at Misenum, I received from the emperor three gold pieces [about fifteen dollars] as road money, and I am getting on fine. I beg of you, my lord father, write me a line, first about your own well-being, secondly about that of my brother and sister, and third in order that I may devotedly greet your hand, because you brought me up well and I may therefore hope for rapid promotion, the gods willing. Give my regards to Capiton [some friend], and my brother and sister, and Serenilla and my friends. I send you by Euktemon my little portrait. My [new Roman] name is Antonius Maximus. I hope that it may go well with you.”

On the left margin, where we see two vertical lines inserted, just as we are accustomed to do, Apion's chums (the other village boys who enlisted with him) sent home their regards. The letter went by the great Roman military post, arrived safely, and was read by the young soldier's waiting father and family in the little village on the Nile. Then years later, after the old father had died, it was lost in the household rubbish, and there, after seventeen hundred years, the modern excavators found it among the fallen walls of the house. The ancient letter had some holes in it, but with it was another letter written by our soldier to his sister years later, after he had long been stationed somewhere on the Roman frontier and had a wife and children of his own. And

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that is all that the rubbish heaps of the village on the Nile have preserved of this lad who entered the army of the great Roman Empire in the second century A.D.

Such an ancient letter is a perfect example of an original or documentary "source" of a kind quite inaccessible to the textbook writer who draws his facts exclusively from other men's



A PAGE FROM THE EARLIEST SURVIVING GREEK BOOK

books. It takes a long time for such documents to be studied, translated into *English*, and published. The mere wielder of the shears must therefore wait so long for them that a textbook made up in this way of clippings from other men's books is far behind the times.

This letter is also a good illustration of the striking fact that the most important documents in the history of *Greece and Rome* are now being discovered in the Near Orient, especially Egypt, also in Western Asia. The oldest Greek book we now

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possess was found lying beside the body of a man buried in an Egyptian cemetery, and because of the rainless climate of Egypt it has been preserved, in spite of its being written on perishable papyrus paper. It contains a poem called "The Persians," by the Greek poet Timotheos, who died 357 B.C. His name (Timotheos) may be seen in the third line from the bottom, at the beginning of the line. The poem tells the story of the Battle of Salamis. This copy of the work was written in the lifetime of Alexander the Great.

Among a long list of such documents of the first importance for the history of Greece and Rome, probably the most important was Aristotle's treatise on the government of Athens.

## A NEW AND UNIQUE HISTORICAL LABORATORY

The study of the original documents in *American* history, written perhaps by Washington and the men of his time, requires chiefly a knowledge of *English*, and involves the use of hardly any other languages. But in dealing with the times from which our young Roman soldier's letter comes, a knowledge of a number of languages is necessary, sometimes of languages which, having ceased to be spoken or written, became "dead languages" centuries ago, and have therefore had to be deciphered in recent times. The story of such recovery of whole ages and peoples reads like a romance.

Greek and Latin have never been wholly lost languages, but languages like Babylonian or Assyrian (written in *cuneiform*) or Egyptian (written in *hieroglyphic* or *hieratic*) were completely lost to us. Not only did they have to be deciphered, but they are still being carefully investigated and our ability to read them is constantly improving; some of them, like Hittite or ancient Ægean (Cretan), are still only partially deciphered. Besides continuing the investigation of these lost languages, the

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historian of ancient times must deal with a constantly growing series of entirely *new* monuments and documents, such as our young Roman soldier's letter, which are every year being discovered in Europe, Western Asia, and Northern Africa. Such discoveries require him to explore and excavate the ancient



ONE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO EXPEDITIONS PHOTOGRAPHING INSCRIPTIONS ON THE UPPER NILE UNDER PROFESSOR BREASTED'S DIRECTION

buried cities and cemeteries of these lands,—especially in Greece, Italy, and the Near East (Egypt and Western Asia).

Very little has been done by modern institutions to aid the historian in meeting this situation successfully. It has not been fully recognized by university boards of trustees that, precisely like the natural sciences, so history, in carrying on the investigation of the career of man, especially in ancient times,

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demands a *fully equipped research laboratory*. The trustees of The University of Chicago, however, have cordially supported and encouraged the plans of Professor James H. Breasted and have enabled him to organize such a historical laboratory, which is known as the Oriental Institute. Housed in a building of its own, the new institute has begun its work as the first such laboratory of ancient history in the world.

### THE ASSYRIAN DICTIONARY

It would be impossible in this brief space to describe all that is going on in this fascinating workshop. In commodious quarters, recently fitted up and furnished, a staff of young scholars is busily engaged in compiling a comprehensive dictionary of ancient Babylonian and Assyrian speech—a dictionary which will enable us to read more accurately and completely than heretofore the vast body of ancient clay tablets and other cuneiform documents of Western Asia.

### THE FORERUNNERS OF THE BOOK OF THE DEAD

A group of editors, including some of the leading scholars of Europe, are collecting, copying, and arranging for publication early religious documents written in black and red inks on the insides of massive wooden coffins by Egyptian scribes four thousand years ago. These are the archaic materials out of which the Egyptians afterward put together the Book of the Dead, and they reveal to us man's earliest moral intimations,—his dawning discernment of a judgment and moral responsibility beyond the grave.

### AN ENCYCLOPEDIC CARD INDEX OF MONUMENTS AND DISCOVERIES

Another staff of people are industriously indexing the great body of published accounts, researches, investigations, excavations, and discoveries throughout the ancient world. Their work is recorded on cards, alphabetically distributed, forming,

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as it grows, a great catalogue of organized materials, in which it will be possible to find classified by subjects all the most necessary facts from every important excavation or series of researches. These files will thus contain all recent discoveries by leading scholars and excavators all over the world; for the Oriental Institute maintains close relations with the leading scholars, the most important museums, and the chief excavating expeditions of the world, especially in southern Europe and the Near East.

### EXPEDITIONS OF THE NEW INSTITUTE

The Oriental Institute also sends out its own exploring expeditions. With the support and coöperation of the British and French governments, Professor Breasted led through the Near East the first archæological expedition to go through that region after the World War.

#### AIRPLANE OBSERVATIONS

In Egypt he was granted the use of a scouting plane by Lord Allenby, the conqueror of Jerusalem, and he was thus able to make some interesting surveys and photographs from the air,—a method which makes it possible to discover low-lying mounds and buried walls which would not be discernible by an observer on the ground. The ripples in the desert surface produced by the graves of a prehistoric cemetery can be seen from the air when quite invisible on the ground.

#### PURCHASE OF NEW RECORDS FROM ANTIQUITY DEALERS

He was able to purchase great bodies of ancient documents and monuments for the archives of the Institute. In one of his letters Professor Breasted writes as follows of these purchases:

“The Near East is a vast reservoir of facts concerning early man, and not alone concerning the history of

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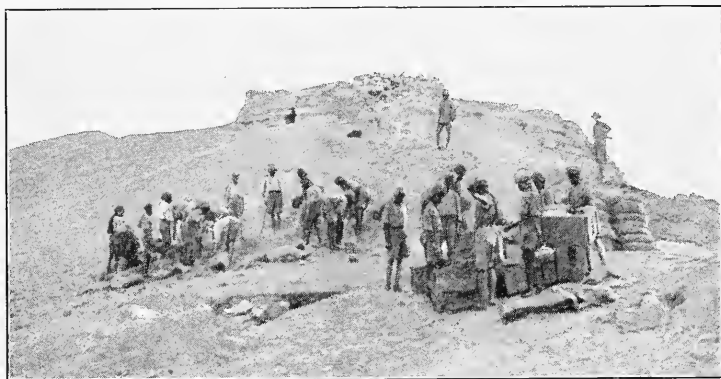
the Orient, but also of the Greeks and Romans. I have been diligently delving among the wealth of remains collected in Cairo in the hands of the oriental antiquity dealers. The most unexpected things turn up and the quest is fascinating.

"One of the dealers here is a very wealthy Syrian Jew, whose name may be left unmentioned. He lives in an oriental palace where he has his antiquities. They form an enormous collection, and I have spent days and days delving among his things. One day when I was dusty and tired and it was time to go home to dinner, he brought in a mass of torn and fragmentary papyri, seemingly only business documents. As I went rather indifferently through them I found a roll containing sixteen columns of beautifully written Greek, each in a fine *book* hand. It was evidently a roll from an ancient library and not merely business documents like the other papyri I had been examining. So, taking more interest, I looked it over a little and at once saw that it was filled with numerals, written of course with Greek letters. Then I saw the words, 'from the Lion to the Virgin,' and among many gaps in the worm-eaten papyrus I saw 'to the Archer'; then 'star,' 'moon,' 'observations,' and it was evident that I held in my hands an old Greek treatise on astrology or astronomy. The character of the writing showed this treatise might be as early as the third century before Christ, and might have belonged to the lost Alexandrian library, or have been written by one of the great group of Greek scientists of that wonderful century to which Euclid and Archimedes and Eratosthenes belonged. It made one's fingers fairly tingle."

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### FIRST ARCHÆOLOGICAL EXPEDITION THROUGH WESTERN ASIA AFTER THE WAR

After spending the greater part of the winter in Egypt Professor Breasted proceeded with his expedition to Western Asia, where he was given the most cordial assistance by the British and French governments. Landing in Lower Babylonia, the expedition ascended the Tigris to the Assyrian capitals (Assur, Calah, Nineveh), and the northern (Kurdish) mountains.



EAST INDIAN TROOPS EXCAVATING, UNDER THE DIRECTION OF PROFESSOR BREASTED, IN AN ANCIENT ROMAN FORTRESS AT SALIHIAH ON THE UPPER EUPHRATES FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO EXPEDITION

### THE MONUMENTS OF ROME IN THE ORIENT

On returning down the Tigris to Babylonia Professor Breasted was asked by the British Government to make a full report on some extraordinary ancient wall paintings found in a Roman fortress three hundred miles up the Euphrates from Bagdad, directly on the British frontier against the Arabs. Of this he wrote as follows :

“British military and civil authorities furnished us with seven automobiles with which to make the desert



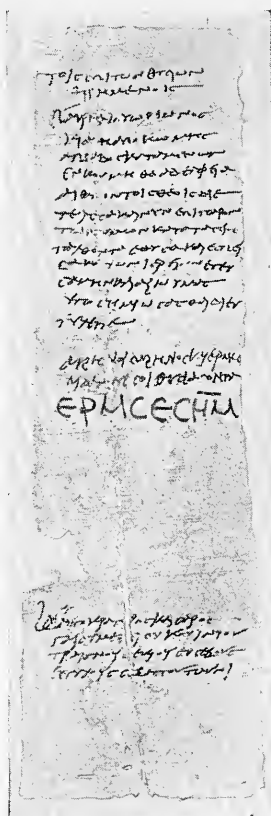
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journey to the old fort, which is at a place called Salihyah. The paintings, some of which we uncovered on the very day of our arrival, proved to be of exceptional interest and value. They are of the age of the famous Queen Zenobia of Palmyra, which is, indeed, only about one hundred fifty miles distant. One of the paintings shows a noble lady like Zenobia in gorgeous oriental costume, with splendid jewels, engaged in public worship with her priests and officers. Another painted wall which we excavated with East Indian troops placed at my disposal by the British showed a group of Roman officers also engaged in public worship before three statues of Roman emperors, and the name of the Roman officer commanding the fort was duly inserted in the painting before his figure. It reads:

### IVL. TERENTIVS. TRIB

Unfortunately we have not yet been able to discover who this 'Julius Terence, Tribune' was. Such worship of the Roman Emperor was expected of every Ro-

date, corresponding to our A.D. 250. Every Roman citizen at this time, no matter what his religion might be, was obliged to possess such a certificate and to show it on demand. A Christian who possessed one was safe from all persecution.



CERTIFICATE      SHOWING  
THAT A ROMAN CITIZEN  
HAD SACRIFICED TO THE  
EMPEROR AS A GOD

In the middle of the specimen here shown we see the heavy black signature of the presiding official, and at the bottom in four lines the

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man citizen as an evidence of loyalty, and, curiously enough, we find surviving in the ruins of Egypt official certificates written on papyrus proving that a citizen had so worshiped in the presence of the magistrate.



PROFESSOR BREASTED STUDYING THE MONUMENTS  
OF ARCHAIC GREECE AT MYCENÆ

“We have in these paintings a new historical monument on the Euphrates frontier of the Roman Empire not long before its official acceptance of Christianity. As works of art, too, the paintings are an important addition to our body of such materials, which have thus far been very scanty, and they will aid us greatly in

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studying this period. The sacred building containing the paintings is without a doubt a temple, standing in a bastion of the Roman stronghold. The British commandant allowed me to use his East Indian troops for excavating the ground plan and determining the shape and size of this temple. The fortress itself is of vast extent with enormous bastions, gates, and walls. Its ancient name is unknown. I shall later be issuing an account of the place. I have already sent in a brief report concerning it to the British Government at Bagdad."

### THE FIRST WHITE MEN TO CROSS THE NEW ARAB STATE

"Leaving the great fort we handed back our seven automobiles to the British Commander, General Cunningham, and shifted to five native wagons, in which we continued our journey up the Euphrates to Aleppo, whence we finally reached the Mediterranean. Our expedition was the first group of white men to make the dangerous crossing of the Arab State of King Faisal after its proclamation.

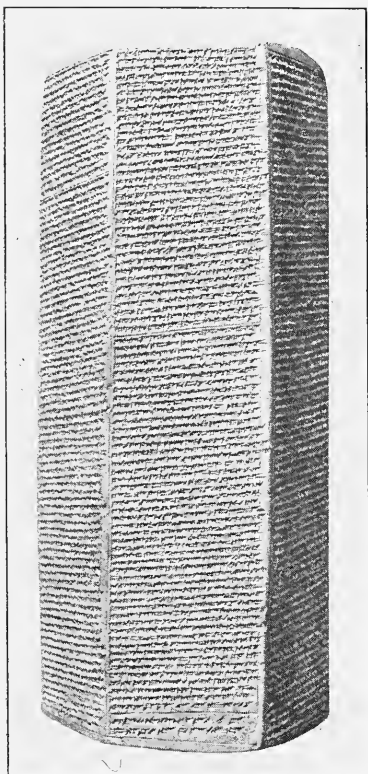
"We then made a rapid inspection of the Phœnician coast and after a visit with King Faisal at Damascus we proceeded to Egypt via Jerusalem. At Cairo Lord Allenby deemed it of importance that the British Government should possess the facts which had come to my knowledge in our overland journey from Bagdad to the Mediterranean and asked me to go on a political mission to England to report the new facts to Mr. Lloyd George and Lord Curzon. I was, of course, glad to be of service after all the kindness and assistance I had received from the British Government in the Near East."

It would be impossible to indicate even by a single word each of the most important monuments in the extensive body of records

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brought back by the expedition. It is of interest, however, to notice the superb six-sided terra cotta prism bearing the military records of the Assyrian Emperor Sennacherib, including his expedition against Jerusalem,—the campaign on which he lost

a large part of his army, as narrated in the Old Testament.



ROYAL ANNALS OF SENNACHERIB

It will be seen that the new historical laboratory at The University of Chicago is a unique workshop for the study of ancient history as it has still to be drawn, by careful investigation, from the ancient monuments themselves. If the projects which it has already begun are carried to completion, this new historical laboratory will eventually be able to put together a fuller and a more nearly complete story than has hitherto been published of the career of man from his rise out of the prehistoric darkness of geological ages, through the emergence of the first great civilized societies to the culmination of ancient life in Greece and Rome. In other words, it should produce the first adequate history

of the origins and early development of civilization, the same civilization which mankind is now endeavoring to preserve and carry forward after the World War.

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From this unique historical laboratory have appeared the ancient-history texts in the Robinson and Breasted series. Through the results of its work these books are kept fully abreast of the most recent discoveries and investigations.

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